

Message

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Subject: 3/31 BNA: Asbestos Too Great a Health Risk to Workers, Consumers: EPA

Asbestos Too Great a Health Risk to Workers, Consumers: EPA

By Pat Rizzuto

Industrial workers and consumers are among the people who face too much risk of cancer or lung disease if they inhale asbestos, the EPA said in a draft analysis released Monday that contradicts what some industry officials have told the agency.

The Environmental Protection Agency said asbestos and asbestos-containing products is used in six different ways by the chemical, oilfield, and other industries, as well as consumers. All six uses posed too great a risk of causing lung cancer or mesothelioma, the agency said.

Among the too-highly-exposed people are individuals using asbestos-containing parts to fix imported car brakes and people near them, the agency said.

If the initial conclusions are issued as final, the EPA would for the first time have to draft regulations to control those risks.

TSCA POSTER CHILD

The EPA's conclusion that asbestos poses too much risk is illustrated by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, which found 45,221 people died from just one asbestos-related disease, malignant mesothelioma, between 1999 and 2015.

Asbestos is among the first 10 existing chemicals the EPA is examining under the 2016 Toxic Substances Control Act amendments, which required the agency—for the first time—to examine the health and environmental risks of chemicals.

Asbestos was a poster child of sorts for the TSCA amendments. In fact, concerns about the clear health risks asbestos can cause, coupled with the agency's inability under the original 1976 law to ban most uses of it, helped bring Republicans and Democrats together in 2016 to amend the statute.

The EPA's conclusion that the risk from asbestos for chloralkali plant workers is too high comes despite extensive safe-use information that chemical manufacturers and the American Chemistry Council provided the agency.

INDUSTRY STRESSED SAFE USES

At least three corporations—Olin Corp., Occidental Chemical Corp., and Westlake Chemical Corp.—are chloralkali manufacturers that use asbestos to manufacture equipment they use to produce chlorine, hydrogen, and caustic soda, also known as lye. Those companies operate 15 chloralkali plants, the EPA said.

Chloralkali manufacturers accounted for all of the 100 metric tons of raw asbestos imported into the U.S. in 2019, the U.S. Geological Survey said in its January mineral commodities [report](#).

That followed about 681 metric tons imported in 2018, 300 metric tons imported in 2017, and 702 metric tons in 2016, according to the U.S. agency that tracks minerals.

The EPA also visited a Chemours Co. facility. That company voluntarily disclosed its use of asbestos-containing equipment to make titanium dioxide.

SECOND ANALYSIS TO COME

The EPA didn't examine the general public's exposure to asbestos. Existing regulations issued under the Clean Air Act, Resource Conservation and Recovery Act, and other laws adequately prevent those types of exposures, the agency said.

Nor did the EPA evaluate situations such as maintenance workers breathing in asbestos as they strip and wax asbestos-tile floors, move ceiling tiles in buildings with spray-applied asbestos fireproofing, and fix boilers in rooms with asbestos-containing insulation. Firefighters' potential exposure to asbestos in buildings also was omitted.

The agency said it will issue a second "supplemental" analysis of the risks that discontinued uses of asbestos pose. The agency didn't offer a timeline for the preparation or release of that second analysis.

The EPA's supplemental analysis will result from a U.S. Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit ruling last November that [found](#) the agency violated the Toxic Substances Control Act by categorically excluding discontinued, or "legacy," uses of chemicals it examines.

Comments on the agency's draft risk evaluation will be due 60 days after the notice announcing the document's availability is published in the Federal Register. The EPA didn't immediately respond to an inquiry about when that will occur. But the agency typically publishes such notices soon after they're posted online.

The EPA also [announced](#) its Scientific Advisory Committee on Chemicals will critique the agency's draft risk analysis via an online, virtual meeting April 27-30.

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